

Old United States Custom House and
Post Office (City Hall)
129-141 North Union Street
Petersburg
Virginia

HABS No. VA-659

HABS
VA
27-PET,
31-

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. VA-659

OLD UNITED STATES CUSTOM HOUSE AND POST OFFICE
(CITY HALL)

HABS
VA
27-PET,
31-

Location: 129-141 North Union Street, Southeast corner of
North Union Street and West Tabb Street,
Petersburg, Virginia

Present Owner: City of Petersburg, City Hall, Petersburg, Virginia

Present Occupant: City of Petersburg

Present Use: City Hall

Brief Statement
of Significance:

This building was designed by Ammi B. Young, first
Supervising Architect of the United States Treasury,
in the Italian Renaissance style. During the War
between the States, it housed the Confederate military
authorities, while the roof was a Confederate signal
station and a favorite place from which to view the
fighting on the eastern front.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: June 1856 - December 1858
2. Architect: Ammi B. Young
3. Original and subsequent owners:

April 18, 1856 - The United States of America acquired the
houses then on the property from Walter F. and Fanny E.
Jones (Deed Books, Clerks Office of Hustings Court,
Petersburg, Vol. 22, page 626).

September 24, 1941 - The City of Petersburg acquired the
building from the United States of America (Deed Book 144,
page 60).

4. Original plans, construction, etc.:

Superintendent of Construction: James Minetree

Contractor: John W. Walker
Carpentry work: Daniel Setzer
Iron work: Uriah Wells
Plaster work: John Minetree
Painting work: David Wilson
Heating work: Messrs. Booth & Somers
Gas fixtures: Messrs. Kerr & Marbury

The following material concerning the original construction of the building, as well as that dealing with later modifications and alterations, has been gathered from various Petersburg newspapers. These are noted in parentheses after the appropriate quotation:

"James Minetree appointed Superintendent of Construction for new Custom House by Secretary of the Treasury."
(The Southside Democrat, Petersburg, March 8, 1854, p. 2, col. 4).

"Messrs. Lewis Lunsford and William N. Friend, commissioners, appointed by the Secretary of the Treasury to superintend arrangements for the new custom house and post office."
(The Southside Democrat, Petersburg, August 26, 1854, p. 2, col. 5).

"Commissioners advertise for suitable property to build Custom House, Post Office and United States Court Room."
(The Southside Democrat, Petersburg, August 29, 1854, p. 2, col. 3).

"Lot of Dr. Walter F. Jones, on the corner of Tabb and Union Streets, selected as site for new Custom House."
(The Southside Democrat, Petersburg, July 13, 1855, p. 2, col. 5).

"We have been favored with a view of the plans connected with the new Custom House and Post-Office, which is to be erected on the corner of Union and Tabb streets, and can truly say that it will be a beautiful and imposing edifice. The building is to front 46 feet on Tabb street, running back 60 feet. Its front line will be 40 feet from Tabb, and its west side 22 feet from Union street. The cellar is to be divided into two apartments - one for storage, and the other for the furnace, which will be of a capacity to heat the entire building. The first floor, or story is allotted to the Post-Office, and will be spacious and very elegantly arranged; is to have two distinct apartments for the delivery of letters, one for ladies, the other for gentlemen.

"The upper of second floor is intended for the Custom office, having an extensive room, well adapted to its purpose; and in connection with it, is a Collector's private office, and also that of a Weigher and Gauger. The roof will be constructed of corrugated, galvanized sheet iron, upon an iron frame, supported upon the beams (like roise iron) of ceiling of the upper stories."
(The Daily Express, Petersburg, Feb. 23, 1856, p. 2, col. 4).

"The proposals received at Washington for the erection of a Custom House and Post Office in Petersburg, were opened on Thursday at 1 o'clock, but on account of certain rules to be observed before the submission of the contract to the cheapest bidder, the official announcement of the successful candidate has been suspended. There were five bidders only Messrs. Bowie, Wright and Sharpe, and Uriah Wells of this city, being among them. The cheapest bidders were, we understand, Messrs. McCullon of Washington city."
(The Daily Express, Petersburg, March 8, 1856, p. 2, col. 5).

"A very large block of granite has just been separated from the extensive quarries of Messrs. Bowie, Wright & Sharpe, situated on Cox's road, a mile and a half in Dinwiddie, which measures about 40 feet in length, 20 in depth and 10 in width. It is intended for the new Custom House, after undergoing a 'dissection of parts.' This granite, known every where in the United States as 'Petersburg granite,' stands equal with the best that can be started; is capable of the handsomest Quinsey granite of Massachusetts."
(The Daily Express, Petersburg, Sept. 19, 1856, p. 2, col. 4).

"Robert Ritchie of Dinwiddie erected pole to support the boom for raising the immense blocks of granite used in erecting the new Post Office. Captain Bowmen, the head-engineer appointed by the government, examined the progress of the work. Hope is expressed that he may see the necessity of recommending the above building be made larger than the plan already laid out."
(The Southside Democrat, Petersburg, Oct. 31, 1856, p.2, col. 5).

"Contract has been made for the new Custom House to cost \$49,300.50."

(The Daily Express, Petersburg, Jan. 23, 1857, p. 2, col. 3).

"Building will be completed about October. Delay caused by difficulty in procuring the large stone from the quarry, the weather, etc."

(The Southside Democrat, Petersburg, February 26, 1857, p. 2, col. 3).

"An appropriation has been made by the government, we understand, for the addition of a third story to the Custom House, now in the course of erection on the corner of Tabb and Union streets. The improvement will add much to its appearance, and at the same time prove a great convenience for clerk's offices and the less important branches of custom house affairs."

"Mr. Walker, we are happy to see, is advancing in the work of construction with considerable energy. That portion of the stone work already completed, seems to be finished in a very workmanlike manner."

(The Daily Express, Petersburg, March 9, 1857, p. 2, col. 3).

"It is proposed to add a handsome portico, having six fluted columns and a suitable flight of steps to the building."

(The Southside Democrat, Petersburg, June 17, 1857, p. 2, col. 6).

"Third story of new Custom House nearing completion. Probably will take twelve months or more to complete building."

(The Daily Express, Petersburg, February 16, 1858, p. 1, col. 4).

"The granite work of the third and last story of the new City Custom House is now quite completed. All that remains is the addition of the ornamental, with minor parts of the plain work to the part connecting with the roof and that immediately contiguous to the ground. The roof and inner portion will shortly be proceeded with."

(The Daily Express, Petersburg, April 16, 1858, p. 1, col. 4).

"The new Custom House is rapidly assuming a completed appearance. The iron railing to be erected will be precisely the same pattern as that, which now encloses the beautiful premises of George W. Bolling, Esq., opposite Popular Lawn."

(The Daily Express, Petersburg, November 26, 1858, p. 1, col. 5).

"The original design of the building was for two stories only, for which the contract was awarded to Mr. John W. Walker of Washington, upon the bid of \$49,000; but soon after the work was commenced, a third story was added, with the acquiescence of the Government, Mr. Walker taking the contract at about \$26,000; making the entire contract about \$75,000.

"...The success of the city's wishes in regard to the erection of the building, is due for the most part, to the well directed services of the Hon. Wm. O. Goode, our excellent representative in Congress.

"...By appointment of the Government, Mr. James Minetree, of this city, has superintended the construction of the building, and has thus far, (as he will throughout,) carried out skillfully, and with the accuracy, the specifications of the work.

"The first floor is allotted solely to the uses of the Post Office, two doors fronting on Union Street, admitting the mails and officers of that department; one on that same street opening upon the vestibule, and two others opening from Tabb street, comprise the three public entrances. The third door fronting on Tabb street, on the east division, is for the accommodation of the Custom House department, on the second floor, and is divided from the vestibule of the post office by an iron railing.

"The floor of the vestibule on both sides of the railing is composed of slate from the Hybe quarries, New York, green and purple, and arranged in mosaic style.

"The Distributing and Delivery Department of the Post Office, is arranged in the shape of an L, the longest part extending from the North door of the Union street front, to the Southern extreme, about 50 feet long by 18 wide. The shorter section extending some twelve feet on the South, is divided by a glass partition from the Postmaster's room, which occupies 15 by 20 feet in the South East corner of the floor.

"The office is separated from the vestibule by frame and sash work, the lower part being wholly wood work, and containing thirteen boxes for editors, merchants and others. The upper half of the sash-work will contain thirteen hundred smaller boxes, with glass fronts,

and numbered accordingly, the whole accommodated with five deliveries. The sashes are arched and will be tastefully grained, as also will be all of the wood work and the window shutters, which latter are of iron.

"The side walls of the Post Office will be of a handsome straw color, laid off into ashlar; the iron mantles to be marbleized. The side walls of the vestibule will be handsomely granitized.

"Eight large cast iron columns support the floors upon each story, having ornamental composite capitals, all to be beautifully painted in imitation of Italian marble.

"The central door, fronting on Union street, will be furnished with a night box for general convenience. There is only one door on the East side, which leads to the rear of the building.

"The second floor is for the exclusive business of the Custom House officers, and is reached from the front on Tabb street (Eastern door) by a flight of stairs, composed of iron, with ornamental iron banisters, and mahogany railing. This department consists of two rooms, the Collector's office being immediately over that of the Postmaster, and of the same dimensions. The rest of the floor, with the exception of the hall, is devoted to the general uses of the department.

"The third story is furnished with four excellent rooms, reached by the same description of stairway, to be used as sleeping apartments. Two, situated oppositely, north and south, and divided by a passage, are twenty-five feet square; the two others, similarly situated, but divided by the hall, are somewhat smaller, but are nevertheless very comfortable apartments.

"The pitch of the first and second stories is fifteen feet; the third, eighteen.

"The floors are composed of segmental arches of brick, filled in with concrete to their levels, upon which the flooring (pine) is laid, iron beams forming the support.

*The roof is entirely of iron, covered with corrugated galvanized sheeting, and is reached by the stair from an ante in the third story, looking upon Union street.

"The exterior of the building has a neat and handsome appearance. The dimensions of its base are 45 feet on Tabb by 60 feet on Union street - interior 41 by 56 feet.

"Every apartment is warmed by a hot air furnace, located in the north-east section of the cellar, in a room 20 by 30 feet. Large tin pipes lead up to the first floor, and thence the heat is conveyed to the upper apartments through the iron columns - the remaining part of the cellar will be appropriated to the storage of coal and other articles ad libitum.

"The front court on Tabb street will be protected by an iron railing, set in a wall of granite, divided in the centre by the entrance steps, eighteen feet wide, from which will be a pavement of North River flagging to the steps of the post office; on each side of which will be grass plots, ornamented with trees.

"The Union street front will be paved entirely with flagging, and the rear laid off in grass plots, with a common pavement running through to the eastern side for the convenience of vehicles designed to have access to the cellars on the east. The Tabb street railing will turn into Union street as far as the corner of the building. The Union front will have no railing, except from the South corner, extending with a gateway, to the rear wall, which is of brick, copped with granite, running at right angles from Union street behind the building to Tabb.

"The building throughout will be furnished with city water and gas lights. A large three light chandelier for the vestibule; a four light chandelier in the distributing, the same for the general custom house room, and so on according to the requirements of each contiguous department."

(The Daily Express, Petersburg, December 22, 1858, p. 1, col. 4).

"Post Office moved to new Government building on corner of Tabb and Union streets."

(The Daily Express, Petersburg, January 8, 1859, p. 1, col. 6).

"Secretary of the Treasury authorized to sell portion of Custom House lot with proceeds to be applied to cost of finishing the building and improvements."

(The Press, Petersburg, January 14, 1859, p. 1, col. 6).

"The Iron Railing around the Custom House lot is now in course of erection and will probably be all put up by Saturday. This railing is a handsome one, being divided into sections, with square ornamental columns between, and was constructed by Messrs. Wood & Perrot of Philadelphia, at a cost of \$4 per foot."

(Petersburg Intelligence, March 9, 1859, p. 1, col. 6).

"Custom House moved to new Government building corner of Tabb and Union streets."

(The Press, Petersburg, March 9, 1859, p. 1, col. 6).

5. Alterations and Additions:

In 1870, the structure was remodelled. John Gibson, Jr., of Richmond, superintended the work, which was described in the Petersburg newspapers from June to August of that year:

"The Government appropriated \$10,000 for repairs and improvements to the Post Office and Custom House.

"The changes on the first floor contemplate to throw the Hall so as to front on Union and Tabb streets - mainly on Tabb. With this view, the old stairs leading to the upper floors have been removed and new stairways of easy ascending grade, are being erected in the South-West corner of the building with a main entrance from Union street, but so constructed as also to be approached from the Post Office hall.

"By the new arrangement the Postmaster will have two suitable offices finished handsomely, one public and one private in place of the room heretofore in use by him as his private office.

"The money order department will be immediately on the Union street entrance.

"...The dimensions of the general office will be 30 feet 6 inches by 31 feet in the clear. The lost space heretofore taken up by the old stairs will be thrown into the general office.

"The second floor is approached from the main stairway above described, leading in an open hall - eleven feet in width, extending from front to rear of the building.

Upon this floor will be the main offices of the Internal Revenue and Customs Departments, and a small room for the janitor's use. Sufficient progress has been made on this floor to show that the rooms will be very handsome, well pitched and peculiarly fitted for their purposes.

"The stairway to the third story is a continuation of the two stairways below and will be of the same material - iron of unique pattern. Here too will be found a hall of the same dimensions as the hall just below.

"The roof is reached by stairway from the third floor. A new roof of tinned copper has overlaid the old roof. Two large ventilators of galvanized iron, have been placed in position to properly ventilate the building. The new roofing material, after being thoroughly tested, is now generally used in public and other important buildings.

"...All the Post Office work will be grained off into two imitations and so also the doors throughout the building. ...The Superintendent, Mr. John Gibson, Jr., of Richmond is pushing forward actively the repairs and improvements above noticed."

(Daily Courier, Petersburg, September 14, 1870, p. 1, col. 3,
Daily Courier, Petersburg, June 28, 1870, p. 3, col. 2,
Daily Courier, Petersburg, August 3, 1870, p. 3, col. 1,
The Petersburg Index, Petersburg, July 26, 1870, p. 3, col. 1,
The Petersburg Index, Petersburg, August 4, 1870, p. 2, col. 3,
The Petersburg Index, Petersburg, August 6, 1870, p. 3, col. 1,
The Petersburg Index, Petersburg, August 24, 1870, p. 3, col. 2.)

In 1908-10, an addition was made to the structure. The work was described in the newspapers as follows:

"Appropriation requested for \$80,000 for addition to post office."

(The Index-Appeal, Petersburg, January 13, 1905, p. 6, col. 1.)

"Messrs. Perkinson & Finn, to whom the contract was awarded, have begun the work of digging the foundation for the addition to the Petersburg Post Office. This firm will also do the concrete work in connection.

"Congress appropriated \$75,000 for the addition to the post office. The contract for the work was awarded to Messrs. Seay & Son, of Lynchburg, on a bid of \$58,000. The south wall of the building will be taken out and the addition will be 35 feet by the present width." (The Evening Progress, Petersburg, October 6, 1908).

"Post office department will move back into remodeled building. The cost of the enlargement, improvement and equipment of the building was about \$66,000." (The Evening Progress, Petersburg, February 22, 1910).

"...The addition, work on which was begun on October 1st, 1908, is of granite, from the Petersburg Granite Quarries in Dinwiddie County. The addition will give a room each on the first floor for the Postmaster and Assistant Postmaster and a separate division for the letter carriers, all of which are located in the south end of the building, besides a large room for the work of the post office department proper. In the post office there are 291 letter boxes. Besides the rooms in the post office there are three extra rooms on the second floor, together with a lavatory. On the third floor there are three extra rooms with a retiring room for ladies and a lavatory. ...In the basement there is a lavatory equipped with hot and cold water for baths. The tread in the stairway of the building are of lead. The entire building is lighted with electricity and heated with hot water. The third floor is unoccupied...

"The new addition cost \$61,421; furniture, \$3,322.31; fixtures, \$1,201.75." (The Index Appeal, Petersburg, February 25, 1910).

In 1938, work was begun, under the auspices of the Works Project Administration, to remodel the building to serve as a City Hall, note of which was made in the June 23, 1938 issue of The Progress-Index.

B. Bibliography

1. Important Old Views:

- a. Published sketch showing the arrival of Union troops in Petersburg in April, 1865, at the intersection of Tabb and Union Streets providing an incidental glimpse of the Custom House and Post Office. Harpers Weekly, April 22, 1865, p. 252

- b. Published photograph showing building before addition of 1908-1910. Art Work of Petersburg, Virginia (Chicago: The Gravure Illustration Company, 1903), plate 3, Petersburg Public Library.
 - c. Published photograph showing building during construction of addition of 1908-1910. Visit of William Howard Taft, President of the United States, and Mrs. Taft on the occasion of the unveiling of a monument erected by the State of Pennsylvania to the third division of the Ninth Army corps of the Army of the Potomac at Fort Mahone (Petersburg: May 19, 1909), p. 20 approx., Centre Hill Museum.
2. Specifications for Building the Custom House and Post Office at Petersburg, Virginia. Washington 1855, A. O. P. Nicholson, Public Printer. (A reproduction of this volume is in the HABS office files).

Prepared by Randall J. Biallas
University of Illinois, Urbana
August 1968

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The building was designed as a custom house and post office by Architect Ammi B. Young and is exemplary of his Italian Renaissance style design of the mid-1800's.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is in good condition; however, considerable changes and alterations have been made to the interior and exterior, including an addition in 1908.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions and shape: Rectangular; the original portion is 46' x 60' and the addition of 1908 is approximately 46' x 100'. There are three stories plus a basement.
2. Foundations: The foundation walls of the original building are stone veneered with brick in some parts. Occasionally these walls have been plastered over and painted. The walls

of the addition are similar. There are twelve large pillars of brick and stone that support the interior columns above (8 in the original and 4 in the addition).

3. Wall construction: All exterior walls are granite, ashlar finish, with full flush mortar joints. The granite is, according to the specifications, backed by brick work set in cement mortar.
4. Chimneys: There are four chimneys, two on front exterior wall (flush) and two on rear (flush). They are faced with granite and rise approximately 6½' above the lower edge of the roof.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The front entrance (west) is comprised of two single doors, each with 12 lights. Above each door is an arched transom of 6 lights. The glass in the archway above each door can be seen from the exterior but from the interior has been blocked off with plywood paneling. The north exterior entry is a handsome double doorway - each door being slightly smaller than the single doors on the west side. There is also an arched transom above this entry, with 6 lights, which is not blocked off from the interior as the west doors are. There have, according to the specifications and early photographs, been several alterations with regard to the exterior doors. For example, an early photograph of the original building shows 3 double doors along the north side. Two of those doors have now been replaced with windows. The only other first floor entry is of no consequence. The basement is entered from the east side through an areaway along the exterior wall and is approximately 12' below the first floor level.
 - b. Windows and shutters: All the windows are identical for each respective floor. The first floor windows are single-hung with only the bottom sash moveable. The total window is 4 lights wide and 5 high. The top of the window is framed in an arch of stone. The arch terminates at a moulded spring belt course which projects 8" from the wall and extends the perimeter of the building at approximately 12' above the ground. This detail, along with the large arches, accentuates and sets off the first floor level. On each floor the windows are recessed back into the wall approximately 1½'. The second story windows are double-hung with 12 lights - 6 to each sash. There is a stone pediment capping each window and the jambs and sill are moulded stone. Below each sill are

two scrolled ornamental iron brackets which rest flush with the wall and the bottom of the sill. The third story windows are similar but without the pediment. Originally, all windows had iron shutters. These have since been removed.

6. Porches: Four steps lead up from three sides to a wide stoop (of granite) at the front entry. The stoop projects out $4\frac{1}{2}$ ' from the wall and is flanked on each side by a striking cast-iron lamp pole (10' high) with a single large ornamental lamp at the top of each. The north side entry is also flanked by cast-iron lanterns which are not free standing but are connected to the wall. According to an early photograph these lamps and those on the front (west) are not original. The north side entry also has a stoop similar to that of the front.
7. Structural system:
 - a. Walls: As previously noted, the walls are granite and brick. They are bearing and carry part of the weight of the floors and roof above.
 - b. Columns: There are 12 interior columns - 8 in the original portion and 4 in the addition - which transfer the weight from the two-way system of girders spanning between the columns.
 - c. Floors: Cast iron beams run between the girders in each floor and in the original portion shallow brick arches span between the beams. These, in turn were filled in with cement mortar and brick bats up to a level even with the bottom of the flooring. These brick arches are not visible anywhere in the building but the fill of brick and cement is apparent in the attic. It is obvious that the same system was not employed in the addition, at least at the third floor ceiling level. The brick arch system is described in the specifications.
 - d. Roof framing: Large wooden rafters tie into the exterior walls and are intermediately supported by extensions of the interior columns projecting from the third floor.
8. Roof shape and covering: A hipped roof rises approximately $5\frac{1}{4}$ ' from the edge to the peak. The roof covering was originally galvanized iron sheet metal but was later recovered with tinned copper. The gutters are built in to the roof and down spouts occur at each corner.

9. Cornice: A large stone cornice extends the entire perimeter of the building, projecting approximately 2' from the wall line. It is a double ogee curve with large dentils (6" high x 4" wide and spaced 2" apart) at the base of the bottom curve. This cornice is one of the striking aspects of the building for it gives a solid termination to the exterior wall line.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans, general. The organization of rooms on each floor has been altered several times and it is difficult to discern exactly what the original floor plans must have been. There is a partial description of the type and number of rooms in the specifications.
 - a. Basement: The basement contains the mechanical equipment and other support facilities for the building; broken down into several small rooms and ante-rooms. Stairs lead down from the first floor at the main central stairway.
 - b. First floor: This floor is primarily an open loft space. It was presumably designed as a public use space and has basically retained this function. The main stairwell is just inside the front entry (west) and directly opposite it on the east wall is a small elevator. The portion of the building along the south wall (1908 addition) has been divided into smaller offices.
 - c. Second and third floor: These two floors are similar: they have a double loaded corridor opening off to East and West. The corridor originally ran the length of the building but in subsequent remodelings and alterations has been shortened to add additional office space. An interesting feature of the third floor plan is the free standing cast-iron column with ornamental composite capital. It is distinctive in that all the remaining interior columns (8' total in the original and 4' in the addition) have either been boxed in or almost completely hidden with the addition of interior walls.
2. Stairways: One large centrally located stairway serves the building. It is distinctive in that it is entirely cast-iron, save for the mahogany railing. This stairway is probably original in that it is described in detail, including the rail, in the specifications for the building. However, according to newspaper accounts it may have been altered somewhat in early remodeling. The south edge of the

stairway was originally at the outer edge of the building. An additional stairway at the south end of the third floor corridor leads to the attic.

3. Flooring: The basement is concrete. The first floor, with exception of entry foyer at stairs, has been covered with modern flooring. The vestibule was originally slate in green and purple and arranged in mosaic style according to the specifications. It is now lighter in color and appears to be a terrazzo finish. The upper floors, all originally pine, have been overlaid with modern tile flooring with exception of one or two rooms on each floor.
4. Wall and ceiling finish:
 - a. Basement: The foundation walls are exposed and have been painted. Interior walls are painted plaster. The ceiling is exposed structure, painted.
 - b. First floor: The large open loft space of the first floor has wood paneling approximately 4½" high with painted, plastered walls above. The fireplaces along West and East wall have been blocked off and covered over. The ceiling is plastered and the exposed beams, also plastered, are set off with ornate moulding and dentil work. The recessed ceiling area between the two way beam system is expressed with moulded plaster detailing around the perimeter of the recession. Walls and ceilings in all other rooms are plastered and painted. Notes in the specifications indicate that the side walls of the post office were originally ashlar, the iron mantels of the fireplace being marbleized. The vestibule walls were granitized.
 - c. Second floor and third floor: All walls and ceilings are painted and plastered with the partial exception of the "Council Chamber" at the south end of the third floor which has handsome wood paneling, probably mahogany, to 5½' level on all walls. Above this, the walls are plaster, painted.
5. Doorways and doors: It is difficult to distinguish which doors are original. The doors are, however, distinctive for their height (10') in most cases. The door heads in the hall are further noteworthy for the cornice-like projection of moulded wood. Trim on all doors, of the upper floors is painted white.
6. Details and trim: The column capitals are partially exposed even though the columns have been encased and appear

as pilasters along the hall walls. The specifications indicate that the columns were originally painted in an imitation of Italian marble.

7. Lighting: Modern
8. Heating: Steam radiators. An interesting feature of the original building was that the heating was carried by ductwork to the first floor and from there to the upper floors through the eight interior cast-iron columns - each with a register at its base. The register is still visible on the one remaining uncased column at the third floor.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. Orientation and general setting: The building faces west at the corner of Union and West Tabb Street about one block west of the main commercial district. Directly across the street to the north is Tabb Street Presbyterian Church.
2. Outbuildings: None exist; however, there was originally a brick privy at the rear of the building (between it and the present Hotel Petersburg, 30' to the east). This area is not a paved service area.
3. Landscaping and walks: The building is set back approximately 30' from the street on the west and 40' on the north and raised approximately 2½' to 3' above street level. A low stone wall separates the raised lawn area adjacent to the building from the sidewalk on two sides (north and west). There is one tree on the lot - a large desiduous tree on the north lawn. At the northwest corner on the lawn area is a flagpole with a small World War II monument adjacent to it. An early photograph shows an iron fence with square ornamental columns extending along the north and west sides on the top of the low wall previously mentioned. This fence is no longer standing.

Prepared by John M. McRae
University of Florida
July 1968

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of the documentation made during the 1968 Petersburg Summer Project, undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with The Historic Petersburg Foundation, Inc., with

financial assistance from The Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission. During the summer, records were made of twenty-two buildings in the city.

The project was under the general direction of James C. Massey, Chief, Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Supervisor was John M. McRae of the University of Florida. The recording team was composed of Randall J. Biallas, historian (University of Illinois, Urbana), and student assistant architects Michael Hamilton (University of Arizona), Thomas J. Sanford (Washington State University), and Edwin S. Smith, Jr. (Rhode Island School of Design). Photographs were made by George Eisenman.

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Addendum to

HABS No. VA-659

United States Custom House
and Post Office, Old
(City Hall)
129-141 North Union Street
Petersburg, (Independent City)
Virginia

P H O T O G R A P H S

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240